

Saint Pius X



Pope of the Eucharist

Saint Pius X

Pope of the Eucharist

By:

Reverend D. G. Byrne

Cover Art: “His Holiness Pius X,” by Liborio Prosperi (1854 – 1928). It is from “Sovereigns Number 28,” Vanity Fair Magazine, December 10, 1903. Digitized version is from University of Virginia Fine Arts Library. This work is in the Public Domain.*



The work of art itself is in the public domain in the United States and countries with a copyright term of life of the author plus 80 years or less. The work was published in the United States before 1923.

Pope of the Eucharist

The car swished up to the curb and came to a halt. The rain was falling more heavily, thought Father Lawrence, as he turned off the ignition. Of all the nights a man chooses to go out, he picks this one! Still, he had promised the Mortons so often in the past that he would be over and something had always happened to prevent him. There was the time when he was all set to come and a non-Catholic enquirer had called in unexpectedly just as he was leaving. Another time, he was struggling with a bout of influenza and he had to stay on duty. The last time, Mrs. Murphy had a stroke—her last, poor soul—and he had to call the Mortons and cancel. No, he had stood them up too often in the past and a few drops of rain would not keep him away. Besides, he always enjoyed himself when he went to the Mortons. Perhaps the world was falling to pieces, but people like the Mortons gave one hope for the future. Mary and Frank had been married only eight years; soon after the war it was; and the first years had not been easy for them. They had four sturdy children now and were a real credit to their religion and their Catholic way of life. Pity there weren't more like them!

Father Lawrence slammed the car door and walked up the path towards the veranda. Br...rr...rr...r.

The door was opened by a young woman in her late twenties. Nobody would believe that Mary Morton was the mother of four children, thought the priest.

"Oh, it's you, Father, I'm so glad you were able to come! What a night you chose, though," she laughed, "here, let me take your coat and hat; you must be frozen."

The priest unbuttoned his overcoat. He was not a young man by any means and his thirty years as a priest had aged him in many ways. "It is rather cold," he agreed, "that's a nice fire burning away in there!" He nodded towards the living room.

"Yes, come on in, Frank will be here in a minute; he is just getting some more wood."

"By the way," she added confidentially, "Mother has just dropped in. We were having a few words just before you arrived. It started over young Tony of all people, perhaps you could persuade her."

Father Lawrence heard the back door shut and Frank Morton appeared, carrying an armful of wood. "Good evening, Father," he called airily, "It's good to see you."

"I was just talking about Mother, Frank."

Frank smiled ruefully. "You know, Father, some people can never be convinced. But what are we standing out here for? Come on inside. The baby is in bed, but the rest of the children are up. We told them they could stay up and see you."

“Now,” said the priest, “what’s all the trouble?”

Mrs. O’Shaughnessy, Mary’s mother, immediately assumed command saying, “This concerns Tony, Father. As you know, he is to receive his First Communion next month, and.... Well, I think he is too young. Why, when I was girl, no one would....”

Father Lawrence stroked his chin, a characteristic action of his. Mrs. O’Shaughnessy had the best intentions in the world, of course, but why, oh why, did she try to bring up her own daughter’s children.

“Yes, Mrs. O’Shaughnessy,” he interrupted good humouredly. “When you were a girl—when we both were young for that matter—children didn’t receive Holy Communion until they were ten or eleven. Honestly, looking back, do you really think it was a good thing? You forget that it was Christ Himself who said, ‘Suffer the little ones to come unto Me, and prevent them not.’ Why weren’t they allowed to receive Our Lord into their hearts when, in fact, they had been ready years previously?”

“You see,” he continued, “it all arose from a wrong idea of Communion. When Christ instituted the Eucharist, He was not so much seeking His own glory. What He wanted was to make mankind holier. Holy Communion is not meant to be a reward for virtue. It is spiritual nourishment—in plain English, food for the soul. That has always been the mind of the Church, who advises all, young and old, to receive Communion provided they have the right intention. However, a bad custom grew up in Europe, especially in France, to make children wait for many years. Early in the 20th Century, somebody changed all that.”

Margaret, aged six, and Bill, aged four, had been quiet all this time. “Who was that, Father?” they suddenly asked in chorus.

“Aw,” crowed Tony, importantly, “everyone knows that. Sister Clare was talking about him at Communion Class this morning.”

“Tell us about him, Father,” piped in Margaret and Bill, “please!”

“Careful, Father,” said Frank Morton, “you know what these kids of mine are like.”

Father Lawrence gazed into the fire. “Well, his name is in the news these days,” he said taking a sip of his coffee, “and besides, his life may have interest for you older children too!”

Once Upon a Time...

“To begin, his name was Giuseppe Sarto—in English that would be Joseph Taylor—Sarto being the Italian for Tailor—but you wouldn’t know him by that name though you all have heard of him. It was this little lad, Giuseppe, who later became the famous Pius X. Anyway, young Giuseppe was born in the village of Riese in Northern Italy—Venetia it was—on 2 June 1835. His father was the local postman and he had to struggle pretty hard to feed and clothe his family of ten—four boys and six girls. The Sartos were what you might call a model Christian family and, like good Catholic parents the world over, they brought up their children with a great love of God and His holy Mother. Just as they co-operated with God in bringing their eldest son into the world and training him, I am sure they are now sharing his glory in heaven.”

“You know, Father,” Frank Morton reflected, “occasionally I do get the urge to read the lives of saints and other holy people, but, oh, I don’t know! All that praying, and those fasts and the rest of it. Well, I couldn’t imagine myself doing all that sort of thing.”

“I know what you mean,” smiled Father sympathetically.

“Some saints did lead extraordinary lives and they are to be admired, but they are not easily imitated. God, you know, raises up all the saints, and the more austere saints seem to have been placed in those times when the majority of the people were leading very loose lives. Perhaps God wanted to shock those people into a holier way of life by putting into their midst one whose life was a direct contrast to theirs. However, not all saints were of that sort. Look at Saint John Bosco or the Little Flower—saints who did the ordinary things that we have to do but with this difference—they did the ordinary things extraordinarily well. We can both admire and imitate them. Giuseppe Sarto was, thank God, one of these—he was like many young Venetian boys—he worked hard, always enjoyed a joke, and, it seems, was not above raiding a neighbor’s cherry orchard now and again.”

Tony’s eyes opened wide. “He’s no different from the kids around here, then?”

“He improved later, though, Tony,” winked the priest. “When he was old enough, he became an altar boy, like many a young people today. Even at that age he liked to drop in and talk to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament; perhaps this was the beginning of his life-long devotion to the Blessed Eucharist.”

Father Lawrence took a sip of his coffee and slowly, deliberately paused to consider his next words. “Yes, the Sartos were poor people and young Joseph had to tramp over four miles to school every day, his lunch stuffed inside his shirt and his shoes strung around his neck to save the leather. Later on, things got a little better and he and his brother were given a donkey and cart.”

Vocation

“That briefly sums up the childhood of the future Pope. By now, Joseph was a youth of seventeen and it was high time he decided on a career. He had done well at school, really well, we are told, and had topped his class at the secondary school at Castelfranco. During his last years at school, the thought of the Priesthood had presented itself. However, the Priesthood involves long years of training and training involves expense. In a family such as the Sartos, every penny had to be considered. It seemed as though Joseph would have to put the thought of becoming a priest out of his head.”

Frank nodded. “But Father, surely, if God gave a man a vocation, the man would be bound to follow up on that—and God would somehow find the means.”

“A good point, Frank, but are you sure you have the correct idea on vocations?”

“Yes, Father, I think so. God gives the call to certain men to become priests and they answer that call. That is what ‘vocation’ means, isn’t it—a calling?”

Father Lawrence paused before answering. “If you mean that a man will hear an interior voice saying, ‘Come, follow Me,’ you are wrong. There is only one audible vocation given by God and the priest hears it on his Ordination morning. Then the young Deacon hears the words, *‘Accedant qui ordinandi sunt’* or ‘Let those to be ordained, come forward.’ Then, the bishop is bound to make enquiries about the men he is going to ordain. He must be sure the candidate has certain qualities and, if these are present, the bishop may then lawfully ordain the Deacon.”

“What are those qualities, Father?” asked Mrs. Morton.

“Well, the Code of Canon Law—that is, the book of laws that govern the Church says that the candidate must have sufficient learning, sound morals, good health, no impediments, and what is called a supernatural motive—that is just an involved way of saying that the motive must be concerned with God in some way. For instance, if I wanted to be a priest to win esteem from my fellow men, that obviously would not be a supernatural motive! This is what the Church requires when she talks of a vocation.”

“Yes, Father, I can see that,” said Frank. “It seems that I did have the wrong slant on vocations. I thought there would be some sort of supernatural attraction or an invitation from God to become a priest.”

“There is no mention of it in Canon Law, Frank. At the same time, there may have been especially chosen souls who got some sort of divine message but, for the general run of us, positively no! If the average young man expects to hear an angelic voice in his ear, he is going to be disappointed. The only signs of a vocation are the five things I mentioned

earlier. All the desires in the world will make no difference if any of these are missing. That is the Church's teaching on the subject and, as we shall see later, it was the view on vocations formally approved by Pius X."

"To return to Giuseppe Sarto—he had the five essential requirements but, unfortunately, no money. He had offered himself to God for a life of service and God wasn't going to be put out by a small consideration like expense. Besides, God had special plans for this young man."

"God often works through human agents to bring about His plans. That's what happened in the case of young Sarto. Joseph's parish priest, Don Tito Fusarina, was a great friend of the Prefect of Studies at the Seminary of Treviso, so he asked the Prefect to put Joseph's case to the Patriarch of Venice. The Cardinal himself was a peasant's son from Joseph's own village. This, combined with the fact that Joseph had passed with honors in every subject in his examinations, was too much for the Cardinal, and Giuseppe Sarto was awarded a free scholarship at the Seminary of Padua."

Padua

"Everything was now ready for Joseph to begin his seminary course with its Philosophy, Theology, Canon Law, Ecclesiastical History and all the rest. In all the things Joseph tackled, he set himself to do the job at hand and he mastered them all."

Father Lawrence paused. "You know the old saying, 'Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.' I think there is a lot in it. We often look at the results and forget about the work spent in getting those results. So, when you hear of the brilliant young student, Joseph Sarto, graduating with honors each year at the Seminary, don't forget the hard work he had to put in to get those results."

"We are told he was a model seminarian, but don't get the idea that he was in any way narrow-minded. He was in love with God and he quickly learned that the best way to please God was through obedience. He knew that God wanted him to do whatever his superiors told him to do—so he did it! And, he did it with a liveliness and naturalness that won him the esteem of all in the Seminary. Later he could say, "Before one commands, it is necessary first to have learned how to obey."

"He first acquired his taste for Gregorian chant in the Seminary. At that time, Gregorian chant had almost completely lost its popularity and had been replaced by a more operatic form of music. Oh, good music it certainly was, but not very conducive to prayer. Later on, he became choirmaster. Perhaps the experience he gained as choirmaster was the beginning of the reforms that, later on as Pope, he introduced into church music."

“Joseph often remarked in later life that his happiest years were those spent in the Seminary at Padua. However, that happiness was overshadowed by an event that seriously threatened his career as a priest. His father became ill and died, leaving his wife and family in very poor circumstances. Joseph’s mother would not be able to provide for such a large family and, as the eldest, Joseph would have to help out. His mother would not hear of it. The younger boys were growing up and would soon be able to do their share. Meanwhile, she would see that the family would have what they needed.”

“You know,” he said, “it is the Margherita Sartos’ who are the backbone of the Church—valiant women that one reads about in the Book of Wisdom! One day someone should write a book on these women—Blanche of Castile, Margherita Bosco, Margherita Sarto—for it is they who pointed out the way their saintly sons were to follow. Our Divine Lord placed his own Mother over the angels in heaven and these mothers, too, I am sure, will have places in paradise comparable with the places held by their sons. They certainly deserve it!”

“But where are we? Oh yes, by now, it was 1858 and Ordination time was approaching. Joseph was only twenty-three and he had to get a dispensation to be ordained that year because the age for Ordination is twenty-four. On September 18, 1858, Joseph was ordained a priest at the Cathedral of Castelfranco. There, he received from the Bishop the power to perform the greatest act possible for man—the power to offer God the Son to His Eternal Father. To utter the words, ‘I absolve you.’ The next day, Joseph returned to Riese, along the road where as a boy he walked with shoes strung around his neck, along the street he knew so well, to the Church he had loved so much—and there he offered his first Holy Mass.”

Father Lawrence paused. “You know, not even a wedding day can be as happy as the day on which a priest says his first Mass. Few engagements have lasted so long and no preparation is so intense. When the great day arrives, he holds a piece of bread in his hands and, perhaps for the first time, realizes the tremendous power behind the words ‘For This Is My Body.’ ”

There was a silence...

“I have become rather eloquent, I’m afraid,” grinned the priest, “but the joy of Ordination time is unforgettable. So it was with Joseph Sarto—even forty years later, as Pope, he would speak with feeling of the rough, hardworking peasant folk who knelt at the feet of the young ‘Ordinatus’ to receive his benediction.”

First Appointment

“After ordination, a priest receives his first appointment and, in due course, Father Giuseppe Sarto was sent as curate to the village of Tombolo, a pretty little place in hilly, well-timbered country. The people were mainly dairy farmers. They were hard working and they had a vice not altogether unknown in our own country—they were inveterate swearers. Not that they meant anything by it, I am sure, but they had grown up amid it. Father Sarto set out to check the habit and his method was simple. He opened a school for his people—the adults as well as the children—and all could be enrolled provided each ‘pupil’ gave up his habit of swearing. That was his condition and the people accepted him on his terms. Thus, in a comparatively short time, he was able to achieve what normally could be achieved only after many years of preaching and persuading.

Salzano

“After a while he was moved to another village where he was made Parish Priest. Salzano was the name of it and here, as at Tombolo, he gave himself heart and soul to his flock. Soon after he arrived, there was a serious outbreak of cholera. A nineteenth century Italian village did not boast social service facilities, and the new parish priest became its doctor, nurse and sanitary inspector.

“I like this part of his life best. He worked by day attending the sick and dying, and by night burying the dead—and even digging their graves. No wonder he had such power over his people. Gifted orator he certainly was, but it was the kindness of Father Sarto that spoke far more forcefully.”

Canon and Bishop

Father Lawrence leaned back.

“If you were to ask me what was the most outstanding quality of Joseph Sarto, I would say it was his generosity—a generosity that sprang from a great and genuine love. He loved Christ; he saw all men in Christ—members of Christ’s Body—and because he gave his own heart and soul to Christ, he gave himself to men—Christ’s members!”

“He was moved to the Seminary at Treviso in 1875, as Canon, where he was known for his generosity. Many of the poorer students were helped financially, which resulted in the Canon nearly always being penniless. At the Seminary, he corrected many abuses that had unfortunately crept in and in this he was motivated by a burning zeal for good

and holy priests. He was greatly respected at the Seminary—so much so that, when his time came to leave, he felt a general farewell would be too painful. Instead, he gave a letter to the Rector of the Seminary.

“ ‘Tell them I keep them all in my heart, and that they must pray for me,’ he said upon leaving. Then, slipping unnoticed out of the house, he went to meet the carriage ordered for him and left for Mantua.”

Bishop of Mantua

“We shall see later that Pius X took as his motto, ‘*Instaurare Omnia In Christo*’—‘to restore all things in Christ.’ These are words he carried with him through life. As Bishop of Mantua, he had ample opportunity to practice those words. The clergy and people were divided; the recently founded Seminary was almost empty of students; many parishes were without priests; and parish priests often neglected their duties. He immediately set about his work of restoration. He was able to increase the number of seminarians to one hundred and forty-seven; he reformed the clergy; he started sodalities; he set up charitable institutions; he re-introduced Gregorian chant into church music; and he taught the catechism.”

“Not only that, the government was mostly anti-clerical, a not uncommon state of affairs in nineteenth century Italy, and he did his best to establish friendly relations with the state. One letter to the mayor was typical of him. ‘Your new bishop,’ he wrote, ‘poor in everything else, but rich in his love for his flock has no other object than to work for the salvation of souls and from among you one family of friends and brothers.’ Even though the government was Masonic and often bitterly antagonistic, he saw it as the lawfully constituted authority, to be followed in all things not contrary to faith and morals. However, when they overstepped that authority—as later happened in the case of France—he was emphatic in his denunciation and decisive in his action.”

Prince of the Church

“Still greater honors were destined for Bishop Sarto. He had been renowned throughout Mantua for his piety and zeal and, upon the death of Cardinal Agostino, Patriarch of Venice, in 1893, he was chosen as Cardinal Agostino’s successor. Sixteen months passed before he was able to take possession of his See because the Italian Government claimed the right to nominate the new Patriarch—a right that they, of course, in no way possessed—and they refused to recognize Cardinal Sarto’s appointment. The Municipality of Venice backed up the Government’s action since they were also bitterly anti-clerical and only too glad to show their hostility to the Church. By September of

1894, the growing indignation of the Venetians made the Government relent. In due course, Joseph's appointment was confirmed and Cardinal Sarto arrived in Venice to a tremendous welcome from the people. The guns of the arsenal boomed out in salute and, as he stepped into the magnificent launch that carried him to Saint Mark's, all the bells of the city rang out. Every balcony was thronged with cheering crowds; every building bedecked with flags and streamers—with the exception, that is, of the governmental buildings—for the Italian Government was determined to show its opposition to the new Patriarch."

The priest reached for a poker to retrieve a log that was close to falling onto the hearth. He prodded it and they watched the sparks as they raced upwards and disappeared.

"What shall I tell you about him during this time? Shall I tell you of the magnificent Eucharistic Congress, the equal of which Venice has never since seen? Shall I tell you of his attempts to come to peaceful terms with the mostly Masonic part of the Italian Government and, at length, succeeding by the sheer weight of his personality? Shall I tell you of the rebuilding of the bell tower of Saint Mark's?—you'll get that in any life of Pius X. He, no doubt, deserves to live on for those great achievements. However, I like to think of him as the man who visited the slums, the hospitals, and the prisons of Venice. I like to think of him spending long hours in prayer, leading the humble life of a peasant, insofar as he could; and pawning his watch and even his episcopal ring to obtain money for the needy. You see, it was in doing these things that he imitated his Master and it was this that endeared him to the hearts of his people—and helped to make him what he is today, one of the Blessed in Heaven."

There was a silence, but his audience did not press him. It was good to hear Father telling a story.

The Conclave

"I'm getting oratorical again," Father Lawrence confessed. "As you can probably guess, Pius X is a favorite of mine and one of the great lessons he teaches me is that the way to sanctity lies in doing all our daily duties and doing them well. The Little Flower called this round of daily tasks her 'Little Way.' That, I think, is a very happy expression because in our daily lives, there are only the little common humdrum tasks. Not much splash; not much success. Yet it is through these things that you and I will get holier."

Frank's eyes sparkled. "Do you mean, Father, that I'm going to get to heaven by my office work, digging in my garden, and chopping wood?"

"You will, by those and your religious duties as well—attending Sunday Mass and saying your prayers. You see, the ordinary things of our lives are very, very important."

Father let those points sink in before stirring himself to continue.

“But stop interrupting me;” he cut in playfully, “it’s rude. By now, we have come to the year 1903—July 20th, to be exact—and the world was saddened by news of the death of Leo XIII. Leo XIII had awakened the world to its duties towards the working classes and if he had written “*Rerum Novarum*” and nothing else, he would still be remembered and loved. Leo’s activity on behalf of the working class was only part of the untiring work he performed—work that eventually wore out even his lion heart until, on July 20th, God called His faithful servant home.”

Father took another sip of his coffee. “As you know, when a Pope dies, his successor is chosen by the College of Cardinals. The Cardinals are called to Rome for the election; they go, each accompanied by his secretary. Meanwhile, a large part of the Vatican is set aside and divided into apartments or cells. Access to that area is made by one door only—a door that is barred from the outside by the Marshal of the Conclave and from the inside by the Cardinal Camerlengo. Inside this area, all communication with the outside world is at an end until the result of the election is announced.

“Well, that’s what happened in 1903, when Cardinal Sarto was summoned to Rome for the election. Always with an eye to business, he bought a return ticket—to save money. However, that return ticket was destined not to be used.”

Veto

“Before you go on,” Frank interrupted, “I remember reading somewhere that at this election it seemed certain that another Cardinal was going to be elected, but Austria vetoed him—and then, when he was out of the running, Pius X was elected. Was that a fact?”

The priest knitted his brows saying, “No, Frank. That has commonly been said, but it is far from the truth. Austria did attempt a veto, but it was ignored.”

“You see, tradition guides election of a Pope. After Mass, the Cardinals assemble in the Sistine Chapel where the voting takes place. Each Cardinal takes an oath that he will elect the man whom he considers most fitted for the task and places the name of his candidate in a gold chalice on the altar. The Cardinal finally elected must have a two-thirds majority. If this is not attained at the first sitting, the nominations are placed in a stove with a handful of damp straw—to make the smoke black. The chimney extends through a window of the Chapel, so the crowd outside can see clearly that the conclave has not reached a decision. The Conclave meets twice a day until the required two-thirds

majority has been reached. When this is done; the ballots are again burnt in the stove, but this time the straw is not dampened. The smoke given off is white, as a sign to the people waiting outside that they have a new Pope.

“And so it was in 1903. At the first sitting, a certain Cardinal Rampolla had 29 votes and Cardinal Sarto had 5. Then, a Cardinal, at the instigation of Austria, pronounced a veto on Cardinal Rampolla. This veto supposed that the Austrian Emperor had the right to disagree with a nominee, and even to exclude him from election.

“You can imagine what a stir went up at the pronouncing of the veto. Of course, it was disregarded and, as a matter of fact, it increased Cardinal Rampolla’s chances, since sympathy had now been gained in his favor.

“At the next scrutiny, his votes had increased, but, at the same time, the Patriarch’s had doubled and at the next session had doubled again.

“With his increasing favor, Cardinal Sarto’s anguish was apparent to all. Again and again he begged them to forget him as he was utterly incapable of the responsibility. Finally, on the fourth day, the ballots were taken and Joseph Sarto had polled fifty out of the possible sixty-two, eight more than the number required for a valid election. And so, Giuseppe Sarto, son of a peasant, had been elected 259th successor to Peter, the Fisherman.”

Father Lawrence glanced towards the window. The rain was coming down steadily, now.

“Tell me, what was he like to look at, Father?” It was Mrs. O’Shaughnessy who was speaking.

“Well, were you to look at his photo, you would be immediately struck by his expression of great sadness. You would not have called him good looking, but yet, there was something extremely attractive about him. His face was full, his hair white and somewhat unruly, his nose broad, and his mouth generous. But perhaps the most striking feature about him was his eyes—large, solemn, soulful, such as you only see in the very young or the very wise.

“So much for his appearance—now for the man himself. He was one of those people who has a natural charm and makes friends easily. He had a great sense of humor and a quick tongue; the sort of tongue that could sting, but rarely did so. Getting right at the heart of the man, he was an ardent lover of Our Lord and then he loved all men for His sake. His reputation for holiness spread far and wide. ‘I hear you are a Santo, (Saint),’ an enthusiastic lady exclaimed during an audience. ‘You almost have it; but you are wrong on one consonant. It is a Sarto that I am, not a Santo,’ laughed the Pope.”

Pope of Reforms

The Pastor moved his chair nearer the fire. “Well, what shall I tell you about Pius X? It is difficult to pick, because there was so much. For instance, there was his fight against Modernism; the ‘*Motu Proprio*,’ as his famous encyclical letter on church music is called; his clash with the French Government; his decree on Holy Communion; and much more besides.”

“Well, Father,” said Frank, “I’ll give you the lead. What’s all this talk about his reform of Church music? I mean to say, there is a lot of talk these days of ‘Back to Gregorian chant,’—can’t see much in it myself. You can’t compare it with a full choir. Besides, when you...”

“Just a second, Frank,” continued Father Lawrence, “we can’t let this develop into a discussion on sacred music or we’ll be here till midnight. At the time Pius X wrote, there was little to distinguish a full-blooded Credo from an operatic aria. Singers were paid and there was often a full orchestra—including drums—perched up in the choir loft. You have never experienced it. I have, unfortunately, and, believe me, it is something to shock the sensibilities. In his ‘*Motu Proprio*,’ Pius X set down hard and fast rules to govern ecclesiastical music. Operatic effects were relegated to their proper place, which was the theatre. On the other hand, while he did say that Gregorian chant was the most suitable one, he did not exclude other forms of music, provided they were kept within certain defined limits. Pius X had set as his motto ‘*To restore all things in Christ*,’ and this was one of the first of his works of restoration.”

Pope of the Eucharist

“However, his greatest, or to be more accurate, his most famous reform was restoration of the Eucharist to its proper place.”

Father Lawrence leaned down towards young Tony who had long since ceased to take interest in proceedings.

“You see, it was like this, Tony. When Our Lord was alive, He promised that He would come to people in Holy Communion and for many centuries the people used to receive Him often. Then, some wicked men, Jansenists, they called them, said we ought not to receive Our Lord, unless we had shown we were good enough. They also said little boys like you could not receive Our Lord at all and made them wait till they were older because they didn’t know whom they were receiving.”

“But Father, that’s silly! We receive Jesus. And He’s alive as He was on earth, and He stays in us just as He is in the Tabernacle. All the kids in our class know that!” There was no mistaking Tony’s sincerity.

The priest looked up past Tony, to where Mrs. O’Shaughnessy was sitting opposite him. “That reminds me of an English lady who had a private audience with Pius X. She had her little son aged four with her. During the conversation, the little boy ran to the Pope, put his hands on his knees and looked up into his face.”

“How old is he?” asked Pius X.

“He’s four,” answered the mother, “and I hope in a few years he will be old enough to receive his first Communion.”

The Pope took the boy on his knee. “Whom do you receive in Holy Communion?” he asked. “Jesus Christ,” was the prompt answer.

“And who is Jesus Christ?”

“Jesus Christ is God,” he replied no less quickly.

“Bring him to me tomorrow,” said the Pope, turning to the mother, “I will give him Holy Communion myself.”

Father Lawrence continued to look at the chair opposite. Mrs. O’Shaughnessy gave no reply, but he knew he had won his point.

“You see,” he concluded, “for children, Communion is the loving embrace of a Father. For us more sophisticated Catholics, it is more of a welcome to a loved and much honored Guest, with,” he added dryly, “the preoccupations of a hostess.”

Modernism

“Father, about this Modernism you spoke of. You say the Pope condemned it. It seems to line up with all that talk about the Church being the enemy of science! I have always thought that the Church encouraged science and modern thought—and well, if the Pope condemned it...”

“You’re right, Frank, and, in a sense, you’re also wrong. The Church does, and has always championed the cause of science. Anything we discover in the world that leads to a greater appreciation and knowledge of the creator of these wonders is good and the Church encourages it. Unfortunately, lies and perversion can hide under the cloak of science. When this happens, the Church must, and to her credit does, unmask this

deception. She encourages, for example, cancer research and physiology as genuine science, but condemns birth control methods and euthanasia which are merely masquerading as such.”

“It was that way with the heresy of modernism. I don’t want to enter into a detailed discussion on Modernism at this hour of the night; I’ll merely say that it was founded on the philosophy of a man named Kant, a German professor and a Rationalist into the bargain. He believed that science had progressed so far as to be irreconcilable with Christian teaching. Of course, this assumption is absurd, as though a scientific truth could possibly conflict with a revelation from the Author of Truth.”

“Many people were tricked by this new theory and took it for a fact that there was conflict between religion and science. The conclusion should, of course, have been either there was no conflict at all or else the so-called ‘scientific truth’ was unsound. But your Rationalist wouldn’t have it that way. He said there was conflict—the scientific truth was established; therefore bring your religion into line with these new discoveries.”

“It’s interesting to note,” Father Lawrence commented, “that many of the scientific truths have long since been refuted by science itself, but that is beside the point.”

“Rationalism had many offshoots. One of them was, as we have said, Modernism. It made out that religion consisted only in a nice and pious feeling of the heart. If I felt something was good or true, then for me it was good or true. This went by the intellectual name of ‘Immanentism.’ Religion was internal; God revealed Himself to me personally; whatever I felt was right, was right. Therefore, there was no need of a Church to reveal anything to me when God spoke directly to me.”

“This heresy, for heresy it was, threatened the whole set-up of Christianity, the supremacy of the supernatural order, and the authority of the Church and Sacred Scripture. God was expected to dance to the tune of every crackpot scientific theory that presented itself.”

“Believe it or not, Modernism was making great strides in parts of Europe, particularly France, and swift action was called for. It came in the form of the encyclical, ‘*Pascendi*,’ which is recognized as the clearest and most concise exposition of Modernism. It was swift and effective; Modernism was incompatible with Catholicism; it was also incompatible with true science, and Pius said so. ‘Religion has nothing to fear from science,’ he wrote, ‘but much to fear from ignorance.’ Ignorance, yes, he had put his finger right on the cause of the trouble. He formulated drastic measures to stop this cancer from spreading to the clergy and demanded that all, prior to ordination, and professors in seminaries, take an oath not to teach or adhere to Modernism. So the heresy was crushed in its infancy, thanks to Pope Pius X. This man of God showed once again that he had his two feet planted firmly on the ground.”

Pope of the Priesthood

“Dear me,” Father observed, looking at Tony sleeping ever so peacefully. “The child isn’t interested in Modernism—a tragedy! Can’t say I blame him, though.”

“Don’t stop, Father, tell us more,” the others begged.

“Well,” said the priest looking at his watch, “I can’t tell you much more, time won’t permit. But I will tell you of his interest in priests, and I hope that you will pray often for them; pray hard for them.”

“Oh, Father,” laughed Mrs. Morton, pray for priests! We, the poor people, need praying for. Priests are living in the shadow of the Church all the time, and . . . Well, I’m afraid I rarely, if ever, say a prayer for them.”

Father Lawrence looked serious. “Priests need your prayers far more than you imagine. You must remember that the priest is a mediator between God and man. He is prize game for the devil and Satan knows if he gets a priest he gets other souls as well for, if a priest goes to hell, that priest is bound to drag down many other souls with him. So remember that, won’t you, and pray often for your priests. Three ‘Hail Marys’ when he comes onto the altar is not asking too much, I am sure. Yet, if everyone in the church did that, who could even guess the results?”

“I must remember to do that,” said Mrs. O’Shaughnessy.

“Also,” continued Father Lawrence, “the World and the Flesh have a hand in dragging him down too—it’s very easy for the priest to slip, believe me. Pius X thought so, too, and he wrote an encyclical letter to the priests of the world, especially to those who were growing cold in God’s service. ‘*Haerent Animo*’ was the name of it, and in it he outlined a rule of conduct for his priests. He gave them rules for discipline, study, and prayer and he gave rigid instructions for the choice of candidates.

“He also appointed a Commission of Cardinals to examine the subject of vocations to the priesthood. The commission came to the following conclusions:

Firstly, nobody has a right to ordination prior to his pre-selection by the Bishop;

Secondly, the priestly vocation does not require a certain interior attraction to the subject or an invitation of the Holy Ghost to enter the priesthood;

Thirdly, all that is required to be lawfully called by the Bishop is the ‘right intention, probity of life, sufficient knowledge, and the other requirements that give a well-founded hope that the candidate will fulfill his priestly obligations in a worthy manner.’

“These three propositions dealt the deathblow to the old theory about secret promptings and whispered invitations to become priests. Thanks to Pius X, that theory has been buried for all time. His motto was, as we have seen, ‘To restore all things in Christ,’ and in his work of restoration, he naturally did not forget his priests.”

Other Reforms

“And so his reforms went on. He ordered the codification of the Canon Law, which was completed and promulgated by his successor, Benedict XV. He reformed the Breviary and the Missal. There was his decree, ‘*Ne Temere*’ concerning Christian marriage. Many of his reforms brought criticism and abuse upon his aging head (for instance, his clash with the French Government), but subsequent history has shown how wise his actions were.

“Well,” said Father Lawrence, “you have asked me for an account of the life of Pius X and that is about all there is—except, on 20 August 1914, he died.”

“What did he die of?” asked Mrs. Morton.

“A broken heart, I should say—towards the end of his life he saw the clouds of war beginning to loom on the horizon. Again and again, he appealed to the nations to come to agreement, but to no avail. One of the saddest moments of his life, he is reported to have said, was his saying goodbye to a band of seminarians of different nationalities who were recalled from Rome to their own countries, soon to blast each other to pieces. He died on 20 August, peacefully and calmly as he had lived, and you may see his tomb in Saint Peter’s as I have, plain and unostentatious, inscribed with the words:

POPE PIUS X

Poor and Undaunted Champion of the Catholic Faith

Zealous to Restore all Things in Christ

Crowned a Holy Life with a Holy Death

20th August, A.D. 1914

The priest rose to go—it had stopped raining.

“That briefly, is the life of one of the several great Popes we have had in modern times. Leo XIII, has been known as the ‘Pope of the Social Order;’ Benedict XV, ‘Pope of Peace;’ Pius XI, ‘Pope of Catholic Action;’ Pius XII...who knows? Surely, nobody would deny to Pius X the title, ‘Pope of the Eucharist.’ Surely he deserves a prayer of thanks occasionally from us for it is he who re-introduced the practice of frequent Communion. On 29th May, forty years after his death, the world had the opportunity of showing its thanks, when Eugenio Pacelli, another Pius, declared Joseph Sarto to be among the Saints in Heaven.”

The Mortons accompanied the priest to his car.

“Good night, Father,” said Frank, “and thanks for coming.”

“I’ll remember those three Hail Marys,” added Mrs. Morton.

“You see that you do, now,” smiled Father Lawrence.

The engine purred.

“It will be your part in the work of the restoration.”

The car moved off slowly.

“Mmmm,” muttered the priest as he wiped the windscreen, “to restore all things in Christ. My God, what a life...and it is yours, O priest of Jesus Christ...”

Nihil Obstat:

W. M. COLLINS

Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur:

✠ D. MANNIX

Archiepiscopus Melbournensis

June 20, 1954



This e-book was produced by:

The Seraphim Company, Inc.

**8528 Kenosha Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80908-5000**

www.servi.org